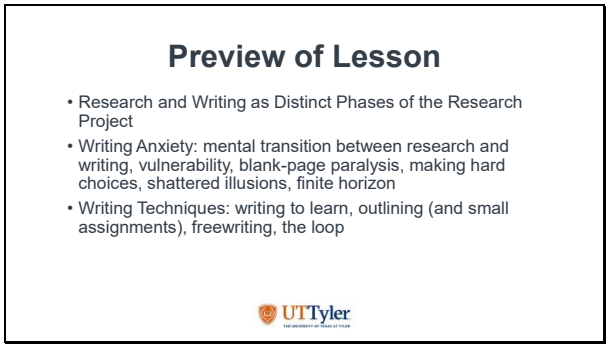
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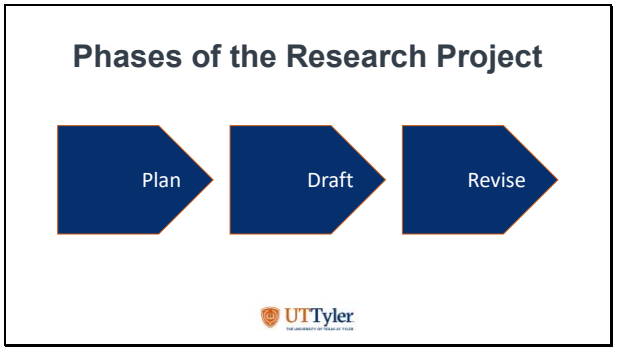


Research Data and Design Lab

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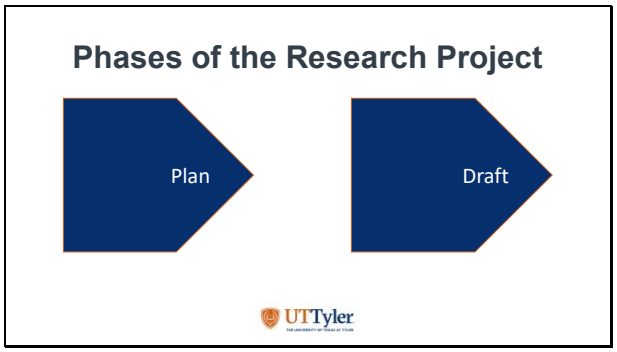


Slide 3



In the broadest sense, there are three phases of a research project: planning (which includes the research), drafting, and revising (which includes publication).

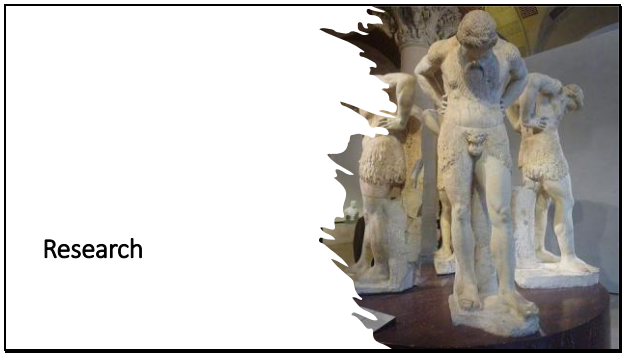
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The focus of today is moving from the planning phase to the drafting/writing phase.

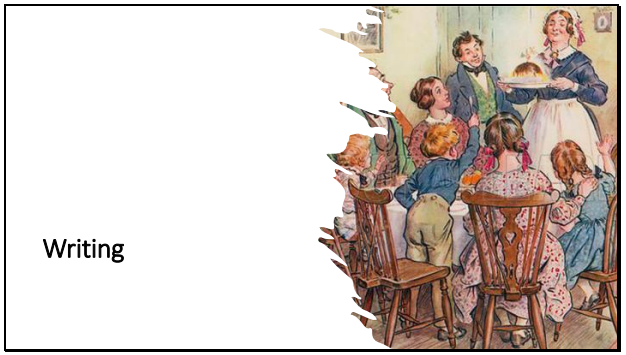
One of the things that trips people up when moving from one phase to the other is that they have different goals. The goals are complementary, but they are different.

Slide 5



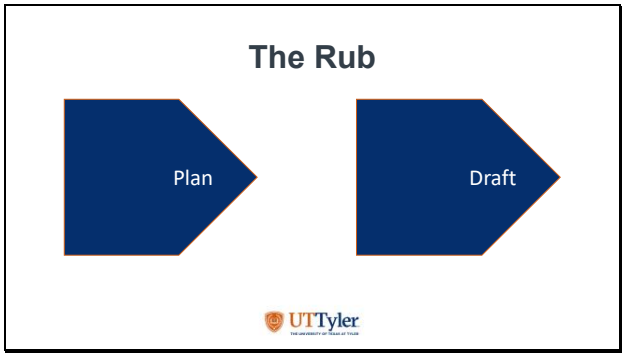
Research is about discovery, working with the data, finding connections, drawing conclusions. In many fields, it's a solitary endeavor—so it's internal. Somewhat like navel-gazing, pure research isn't all that concerned with the outside world.

Slide 6



Writing is about sharing those discoveries, methods, connections, and conclusions with others—while showing enough of your thinking that it all makes sense to someone else. It is external because you're thinking about an audience. Somewhat like cooking, it is a social thing that has real concern about the outside world. (But not always, as we'll see later.)

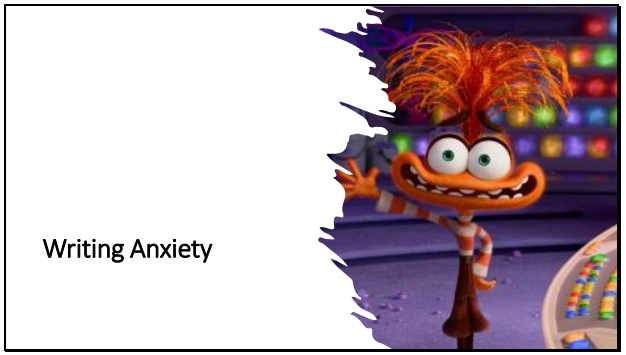
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The difference in nature and goal between these two phases is often the rub for researchers—switching gears from the research mindset to the writing mindset.

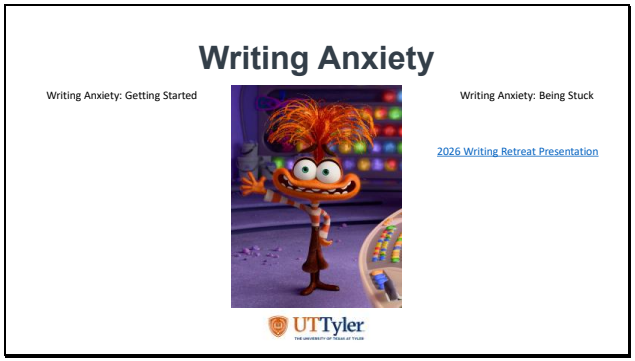
It's a big shift, so you have to give yourself time to transition.

Slide 8



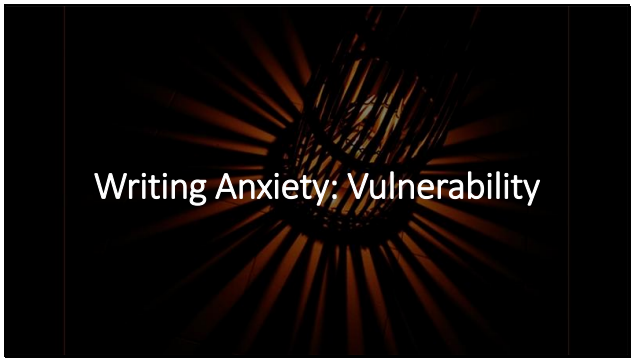
That rush to shift from one phase to the other is actually one cause of writing anxiety, but it's not the only one. So the next is devoted to some of the more common sources of anxiety when people begin the writing process

Slide 9



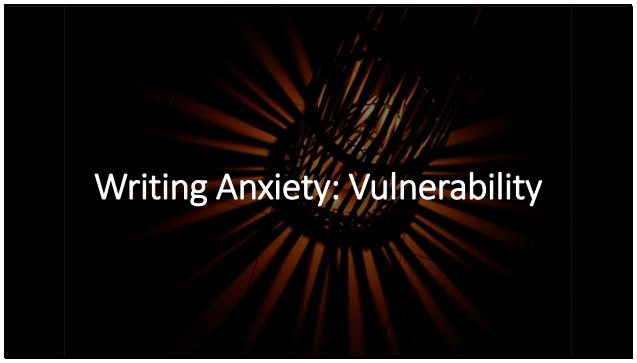
Note: anxiety at/about the beginning of the writing process is different than getting stuck when you're already in the writing process. This is something I've talked about before and is available at the link here.

Slide 10



When you move to the writing phase, you move to the social phase. You're about to make something and put it out in the world where it can be challenged or maybe even rejected. That's a tough thing, so the knee-jerk reaction of many a researcher is to endlessly tinker to avoid making something out of it. If you write nothing, no one can critique it.

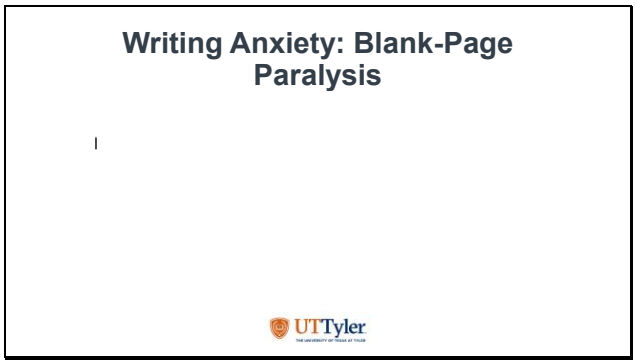
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SOLUTION: This one is all about mindset. You're a part of a scholarly community, and the research you've undertaken is a contribution to that community. If you don't write it up, in a very real way, you're being selfish. It's hidden like the proverbial candle under a bushel and the scholarly community suffers.

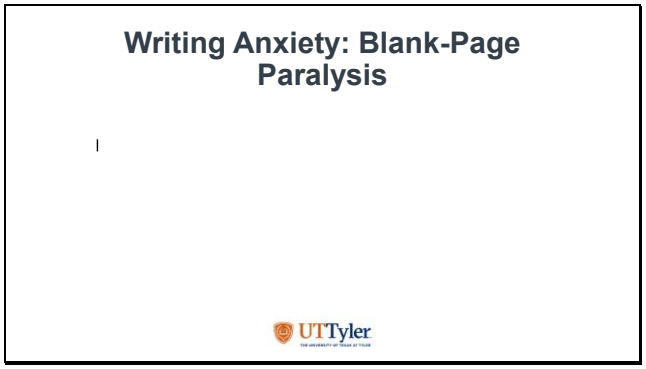
To affect your mindset, think about who might be affected by your work. Maybe there are real-world impacts for students, patients, employees, etc. Or maybe you think about some struggling grad student or researcher in the future who comes across your work and gets the spark needed to push their research in the right direction. You may never know how your work has affected the world, but you can be fairly sure that it will as long as you share it.

Slide 12



The curse of the blank page. You have nothing. The project is such a huge undertaking that you're paralyzed by the enormity of it. And that stupid cursor is just blinking, mocking you.

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SOLUTION: Once you've finished with your research, you really shouldn't have a blank page at all. You should have a pile of notes and data that need to be plugged in in the right places. At this level, the blank page is a myth and should not cause you anxiety at all.

Slide 14



I realize that Monty Hall and *Let's Make a Deal* might be before our times, but beginning the drafting process often feels like you're on this gameshow. When you start writing, it might feel like you must choose among a number of options without knowing how any of them are going to play out. Choosing a path forward often feels like rejecting other, equally great paths forward.

Slide 15



SOLUTION: Something like I've done for the last 20+ years is to keep a Word document called "Things I Didn't Have Time to Do." I put all my other options in there. If you do something like this, you're not fully leaving behind any option.

Sometimes, you'll legitimately return to this document to pick up another one—so in that case, you're just choosing the order in which you'll tackle them.

Other times, you'll never really return to those other ideas—so in that case, it's just a way of psychologically softening the blow of making a choice. Either way, the choice isn't really final.

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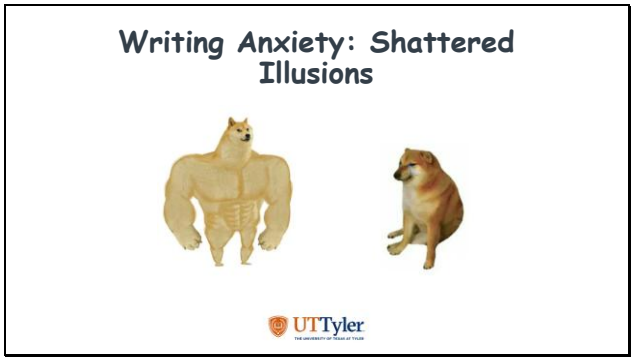
When you develop an idea in your head or in scattered, disconnected notes, your sense of it is that it's powerful, like the meme dog on the left. The fear is that when you start writing it down, the ideas end up seeming simple, clumsy, or just downright bad.

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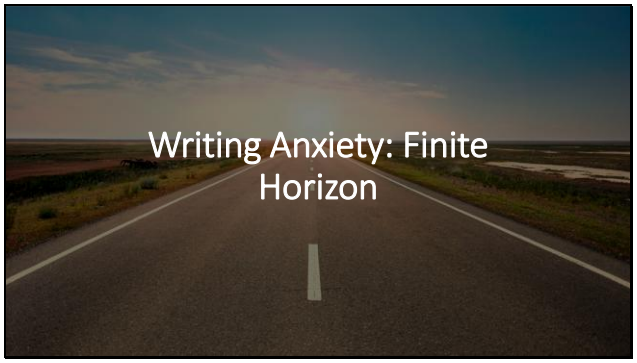
SOLUTION: Understand that your ideas aren't as good or as bad as you think they are.
What matters is that you start somewhere—and generally speaking, rough drafts have nowhere to go but up.

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SOLUTION: If it reinforces the beginning, nascent nature of the draft, write the first one in comic sans. No one takes that font seriously, and you're psychologically lowering the stakes when you write.
Once you start doing the hard work of developing connections, explaining evidence, etc. then change the font to something more scholarly.

Slide 19



The “infinite horizon” of research is safe because there is always one more article to read, one more interview to do, one more data set to look at.
The writing process shrinks that horizon down to a finite one: once you being drafting, you’re saying you know enough to begin. It feels really bold to say you know enough about Shakespeare or the market dynamics of hiring freezes or whatever because they’re such big topics.

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SOLUTION: Here’s the thing: you don’t know enough yet to finish the project. **But you’re not finishing the project, you’re beginning to write it out.** You will eventually know enough to finish because you’ll still learn along the way as you write. You don’t stop learning just because you’ve started writing.

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There are a myriad of techniques available for you to get started on the drafting/writing phase of your project, so I'm just going to share with you a select four.

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Flannery O'Connor, a celebrated Southern American novelist and short story writer, wrote these words in a letter to a friend in 1948. What she meant was that sometimes in the process of writing, we make connections and have insights that we would never have had if we just played with ideas in our own heads.

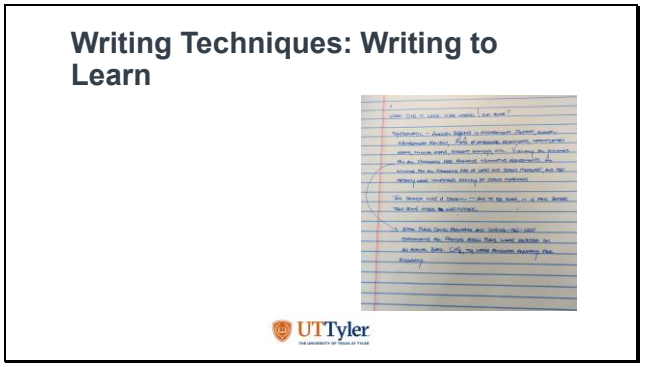
It's called writing to learn or exploratory writing and isn't meant for an audience—which makes it a great option for us. Because you're still focused on exploring and explaining things to yourself, you're still sort of in that research/internal mindset; but because you're writing in a structured way, you're sort of moving to that writing/external mindset.

It's very flexible: you can begin with a prompt ("what am I trying to do here?" or "why do I think my conclusion is valid?") or you can just start writing about the portions of the research that seem either clear to you or that you don't have

as good a handle on. It can be a days-long process or something that takes just half an hour. It can be done longhand or typed. It is generally unstructured and informal, but it can be done in a very structured way.

Writing to learn can be the first step—even before planning and outlining—or it can be a later step that's focused on a particularly stubborn section of the paper. I have used it for both.

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This is a very short example that I did just last week for an article. I was literally talking to myself, trying to take stock of what I knew and didn't know—what might be useful and not useful. It wasn't for the article itself and none of this text showed up in it. I just needed to find out what I knew by writing something out.

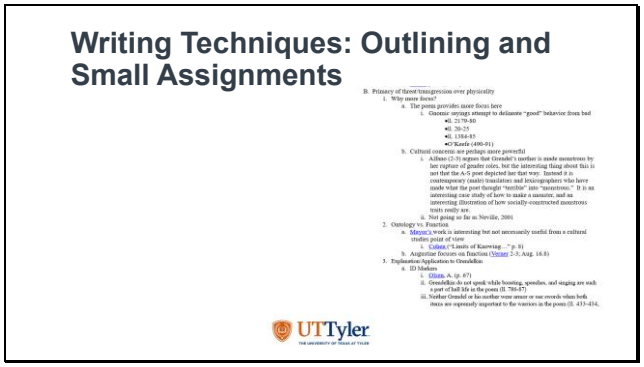
Slide 24



If you've heard me talk about writing at all, you've heard me talk about small assignments and Anne Lamott's 1" frame. Your project is too complex to just "start at the beginning and write it." It's more like this triptych by Heironymous Bosch. If you always approach it as a whole, you're going to get overwhelmed, lost. So you have to take that 1" frame and take it bit by bit.

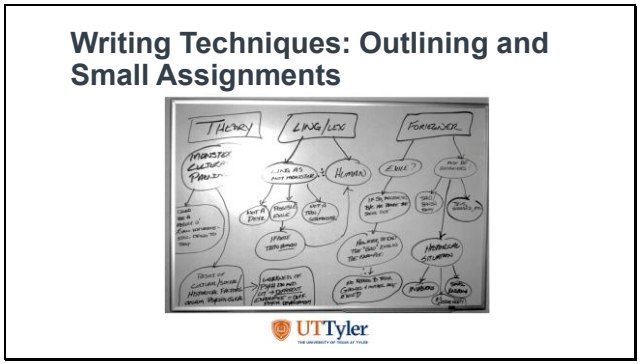
That is not a strategy for getting started, but I bring it up because unless you outline your project, you won't even know what the small assignments are.

Slide 25



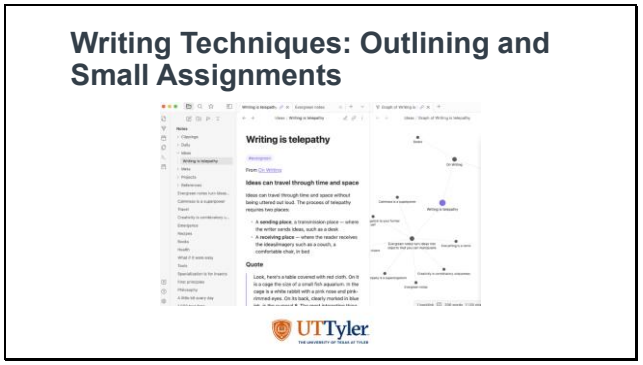
Sometimes, you just can't beat the good old outline. It organizes your sections and points in a linear way, and it can show what parts are subordinate to others. If you work on bits and pieces of your project at different times: this is the roadmap of all roadmaps.

Slide 26



Sometimes, especially early on of if you're a more visual person, idea mapping or clustering is the thing that will get you going. It can show hierarchy like an outline can, but it can also show connections between ideas that aren't linearly close to each other—something an outline can't.
Its weakness, however, is that it just can't show the level of detail that an outline can.
But if you use it in order to produce a working outline, then it's very powerful.

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Somewhere in between are some Personal Knowledge Managers (PKMs), which I'll talk about in a webinar in the Spring. You can keep all your scattered notes and writing in there and then make the connections via tags; something like Obsidian (shown here) will then show you those connections via a graph so you can see something approaching an idea map but also have some real depth in the notes/documents those dots represent.

Slide 28



As I said before, writing to learn is a technique you can use to get ahold of the project and start to craft that outline from it. We'd generally consider this a 0 Draft and not a first draft.

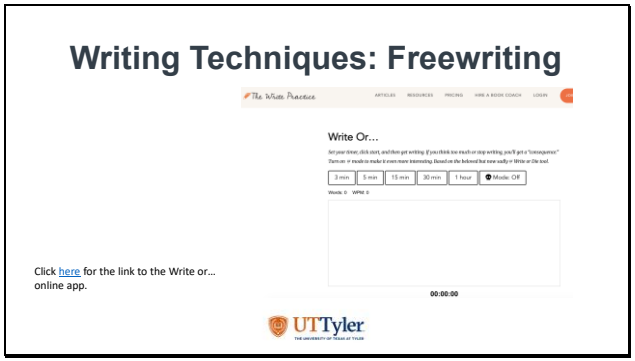
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No matter how you do it, you have to plan things out before you put together that first draft. Planning creates your roadmap. It can function as a re-entry point if you've stepped away from the project for a little. You can consult it when you get lost in the weeds and can't remember what you were trying to do when you started the project.

But most of all, when you're beginning the writing phase, the outline lays out the whole paper in a concentrated form that gives you the confidence to begin that first draft—and the freedom to begin it wherever you want to.

Slide 30

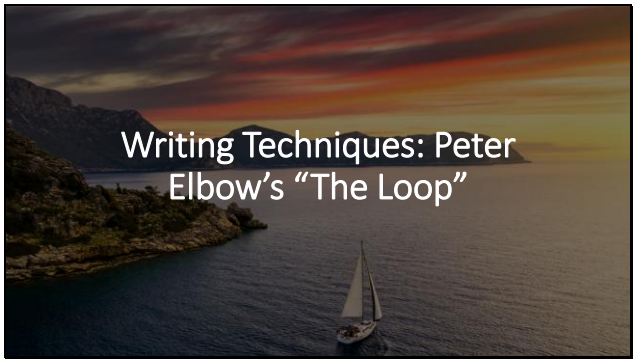


Freewriting is a technique that can be used in a number of different circumstances. Here, I'm mostly talking about it in terms of getting started.
The rules are simple, but you must have the will to follow them. Set a time or a word count goal. Cover the screen or use Write or… Then start writing. And keep going, never stopping, never deleting, still writing when you run out of things to say.

A lot of the text you produce will be trash. That is expected. But more than you might imagine will be useful. You'll be pushed to come up with seemingly weird connections or insights because of the need to keep saying something. You'll get frustrated and the process and fire off an explanation that is more clear and elegant than anything you thought you could come up with. It's hard, and it works.

If you've never done it before, just start with 30 minutes.

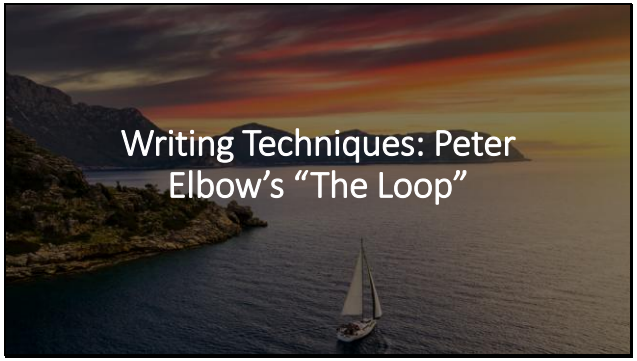
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Peter Elbow called it "the loop," but I think of it as the voyage out and the voyage back. The loop is a middle ground between writing to learn and knowing exactly what you're going to write about before you start.

I find it works best when you've started with something really anemic and can't really develop it.

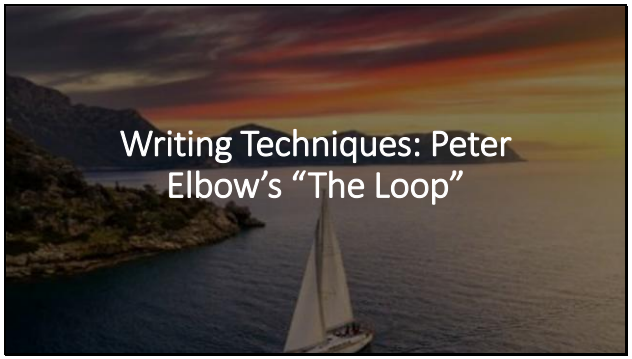
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The way it works is that you begin with a focused, distinct thing that you want to write about. Let's say the cross-case discussion in an article with two case studies. Maybe you can only seem to say something banal about both case studies.

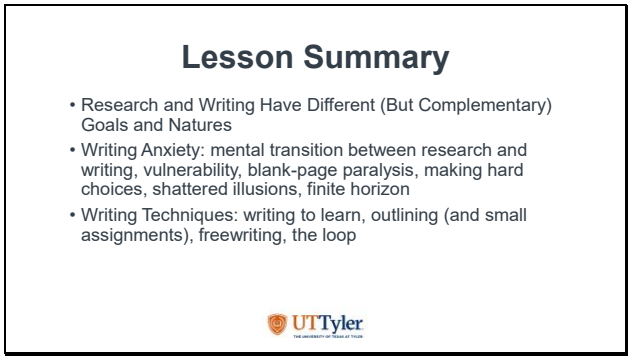
So you take the voyage out—writing very loosely, almost like a freewrite. Maybe you start generally about the topic: phrasing and rephrasing ideas, thinking sideways about things and seeing where that will take you until you get to the point where you almost lose sight of the topic. If you want insights and new understandings, you have to let go and be willing to drift away from the shore on the voyage out.

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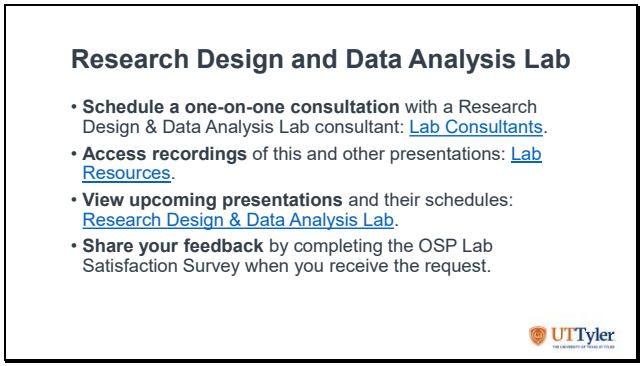


Now comes the voyage in. Look over what you've written with your writing goal now clearly in mind. You're looking for those great insights and useful ideas.
What I like to do is write a revision/response to the voyage out, bringing together all the interesting things I've done and trying to see what works as part of a coherent whole.
The voyage in can be difficult because there is the distinct possibility that you will have more material than you can include in a draft; you're going to have to get comfortable with throwing some of it away, even if it seems good.

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Slide 35



- **Schedule a one-on-one consultation** with a Research Design & Data Analysis Lab consultant: Lab Consultants.
- **Access recordings** of this and other presentations: Lab Resources.
- **View upcoming presentations** and their schedules: Research Design & Data Analysis Lab.
- **Share your feedback** by completing the OSP Lab Satisfaction Survey when you receive the request.